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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1295
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 002944

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/05/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: PAKISTAN'S ELECTIONS: SOLVING THE VOTER ROLL
CONTROVERSY

REF: ISLAMABAD 1842

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Post is quietly engaged with senior Pakistani officials to press for a resolution to credible opposition complaints that perhaps 20 million voters have dropped off the latest Election Commission of Pakistan's voter list. A potential data merger of the Election Commission and National Identity Card lists could add 12-22 million voters to the list; a government decision to subsidize issuance of identity cards could help enfranchise poorer women. Despite concerns about the capability of the Commission, we believe that USAID/IFES efforts have already made a positive contribution to what will be an improved, but still imperfect, election process in Pakistan this year. End Summary.

12. (U) The 2002 general and 2005 local elections revealed institutional and political problems in Pakistan's electoral system, including fraudulent/duplicative voter lists, interference by the intelligence services, violent intimidation of election workers and voters, voter apathy, and weak efforts at registration and substantive campaigning by political parties. USAID/IFES, the International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, UN Development Program, European Union, Asia Foundation and international donors are all working on various projects to ensure the 2007 elections will be free, fair and transparent. These include projects to revise voter rolls, conduct polls, train election officials and party workers, raise public awareness, and provide transparent ballot boxes. This is the second of a series on Pakistan's 2007 elections, and it addresses efforts to update the voter rolls.

Missing: 20 Million Voters?

13. (U) The voter list for the 2002 and 2005 elections, which contained 70 million names, was compiled using 1998 census data. In an attempt to reduce fraud and comply with a 1974 law that required citizens to present a national identity card to vote, the Election Commission in 2006 announced that citizens would be required to have a new Computerized National Identity Card in order to register and vote. Under a USAID contract, IFES is helping the Commission to update

and clean up the voter rolls. Before IFES was embedded in the Commission, however, the Commission conducted what many NGOs and opposition political parties have criticized as a poorly executed house-to-house survey. Based on that survey, the Commission issued a new draft voter list. Of an estimated 82 million eligible voters in 2007, the Commission's revised list includes 52 million, of whom only 36 million have the new identity cards.

¶4. (U) The new draft voter list was released for public display countrywide in mid-June, and the Commission engaged in a public relations campaign to woo voters to the 45,000 display centers countrywide to confirm that their names were on the draft list and, if not, to register. The display period was scheduled to end on July 3. NGO, press, and Mission's observations of these display centers confirm that few voters have visited the display centers, many of which are not open or adequately staffed.

¶5. (C) Elimination of fraudulent or duplicate names explains some, but certainly not all, of the discrepancy in numbers. Not surprisingly, the news that perhaps 20 million voters had dropped off of the list created an uproar among the opposition parties. The latest protest came in the form of a Supreme Court petition submitted by Pakistan People's Party Chairman Benazir Bhutto last week. The petition complained about the loss of large numbers of voters and argued that the Commission cannot require voters to show their the new identity cards in order to register to vote. The petition also complained that the Commission had not supplied political parties with electronic copies of the draft voter rolls, which made it more difficult for them to determine which voters fell off the list. (Note: While the People's

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Party is complaining about the process, the press reports that the smaller religious parties are actually out registering voters.)

¶6. (U) Although the Commission has not responded specifically to the Supreme Court petition, Commission Secretary Kanwar Dilshad has publicly defended the national identity card requirement as a fraud prevention measure and emphasized that the 21-day display period is the time for voters to rectify any mistakes made on the list.

NADRA National Identity Cards

¶7. (U) Beginning in 2002, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) began an ongoing process of producing and distributing new biometric Computerized National Identity Cards. NADRA is a for-profit agency that receives no government funding. NADRA charges 75 rupees (\$1.25) for each card, which makes them inaccessible for the poorest Pakistanis. (Note: The old national identity cards were issued free of charge.) In some tribal areas, women are less likely to pay for identity cards or register to vote. NADRA now has 58 million voter-eligible names on its list of new identity card holders.

Commission/NADRA Data Merger?

¶8. (C) Senior government officials are now responding to what Chief Election Commissioner Qazi Mohammed Farooq admitted to A/S Boucher on June 13 that unless at least 10 million more voters are added to the draft voter lists, the general elections will not be credible. Last week, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz requested that the Commission provide him with a status report on the draft voter rolls. The Deputy Chief of Mission confirmed the Prime Minister's interest in addressing the list problem in meetings with both Tariq Aziz, the President's Chief of Staff, and NADRA Chairman Salee Ahmed Moeen. In a subsequent meeting, Aziz promised the Deputy Chief of Mission immediate access to the Commission to

discuss the issue.

¶9. (C) Moeen told the Charge that if the Commission requested assistance, NADRA could merge its list with that of the Commission. IFES technical experts confirm that this is possible and could result in an increase of 12-22 million names on the voter list. The Commission is unlikely to request help without political pressure, so post is quietly engaged in efforts to convince the PM/President's office to press for efforts to increase the voter rolls, and to obtain the buy-in of international donors for this effort.

¶10. (C) We are still awaiting estimated merger costs, which would have to be negotiated, from NADRA. It is unclear if the government would be willing to pay for the merger, but we understand that Japan may consider assisting this effort. Post also pressed government officials to increase voter rolls by subsidizing the costs of issuing new identity cards.

Comment

¶11. (C) Convincing the Commission to increase voter rolls enough to meet both domestic and international standards of credibility will be only the first step in helping Pakistan conduct free, fair and transparent elections. Despite concerns about the capability of the Commission to deliver, we believe that USAID/IFES efforts have already made a positive contribution to what will be improved, but still imperfect, elections in Pakistan this year.

PATTERSON